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SUBJECT: RELIGIOUS IDENTITY CONVICTION AND PRISON SENTENCE

REF: 06 CAIRO 7164

Sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

¶1. (SBU) Summary: On November 21, a Cairo criminal court sentenced an Egyptian Christian woman, Shadia Nagui Ibrahim, to three years in prison for fraud regarding her religious identity. The conviction stems from Ibrahim's father's brief conversion to Islam in 1962 and Ibrahim's subsequent declaration during her 1981 wedding that she was Christian. Ibrahim's lawyer advised us on November 25 that she is currently imprisoned and has little hope of being freed on appeal. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) According to Ramses Al Najaar, Ibrahim's attorney, in 1964, when Ibrahim was 3 or 4 years old and living with her family in the Nile Delta village of Miet Ghamer, her father left the family and briefly converted from Christianity to Islam. Within a year, Ibrahim's father returned and reconverted to Christianity. According to Najaar, she was unaware of her father's conversion and was raised as a Christian. In 1981, she married and stated on her marriage certificate that she was Christian.

¶3. (SBU) In 1996, a minor local official, who assisted Ibrahim's father years earlier in documenting his reconversion, was arrested for falsifying documents. During the investigation, Ibrahim's father also was arrested. In 1997, Ibrahim and her sister, Bahiah Ibrahim, visited their father at the local jail. They told investigators that they were unaware of their father's conversion and that they had always been Christians. They were then accused of falsely claiming on official documents - Ibrahim's marriage certificate, Shadia's national identification card - to be Christians. Following an investigation which the family thought had been closed, the two sisters were tried in absentia in 2000, convicted of fraud, and sentenced to three years in prison.

¶4. (SBU) No action was taken to enforce the 2000 conviction until August 26, 2007, when police arrested Ibrahim. In accordance with Egyptian criminal law, the court vacated the earlier conviction in absentia, and, on November 21, she was re-tried, convicted of fraud, and sentenced again to three years in prison, the maximum possible sentence.

¶5. (SBU) On November 25, we met with Najaar. He attributed the renewed prosecution of the case to the recent attention and controversy surrounding the issue of religious identification, something that is required on all official documents. The plight of Egypt's small Baha'i minority, who are unable to obtain national identification cards or other official documents, has drawn attention to the issue (reftel), as has the case of a number of reconverts to Christianity. Ibrahim's lawyer said that since the 2000

conviction, Ibrahim has paid bribes to keep the public prosecutor from arresting her and enforcing the sentence. With the recent focus on the issue, the lawyer said bribes are no longer sufficient. Ibrahim's lawyer said he will file an appeal, but he has little hope that it will succeed. She is currently imprisoned and the lawyer expects she will serve the full three-year sentence.

16. (SBU) When we raised the case with the MFA on November 26, they claimed to be unaware of it but promised to look into it. We will follow-up closely.

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